

The Oxford Handbook of the Incas
Edited by Sonia Alconini and R. Alan Covey

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The Oxford Handbook of the Incas adds to the rapidly growing Oxford Handbooks series with 54 titles published on archaeology alone between 2009 and 2019. This volume aims to provide a *tour de horizon* of contemporary Inca studies, a field that has seen substantial growth over the past four decades. Drawing together contributions from 48 authors including both senior scholars and younger researchers, the book highlights recent insights that archaeology, history, art history, architectural studies and cultural anthropology have provided into the largest empire in the prehispanic New World. This volume is an important addition to growing efforts to synthesise research on the Inca, with recent edited volumes including Shimada's *The Inka: A Multidisciplinary Synthesis* (2015), Urton and von Hagen's *Encyclopedia of the Incas* (2015), and key textbooks by D'Altroy (2015) and Kolata (2013) among others. As such, its potential impact can and should be understood within this broader set of current syntheses.

While this mammoth volume of 47 chapters provides a daunting challenge to any reviewer, it is clearly and carefully structured into the following

major domains of Inca studies research: the origins and development of the empire, imperial centres, political economy, imperial identities, sacred landscapes, Inca aesthetics, the Colonial Era, and the roles of the Inca past in the present. Each of the sections concludes with a critical recapitulation by the editors that seeks to trace linkages across the chapters and to highlight emergent themes. The volume begins with a section on Inca origins and historiography, with chapters examining research on the archaeological and textual bases for current interpretations of Inca history. Moore and Pillsbury's contributions stand out here with their respective deft overviews of pre-Inca statecraft and colonial sources. Section two moves to examine the archaeology of administrative centres and royal estates, ranging from sites within the imperial landscape of the Cuzco region to the establishment of 'other Cuzcos' such as Incallacta (Bolivia) and Tomebamba (Ecuador). Bray and Eeckhout's chapters provide particularly clear overviews of the Inca presence in Ecuador and at the major coastal site of Pachacamac and its environs.

The subsequent three sections explore the multiple forms of Inca hegemony as projected across the Andes and the contrasting ways that local communities negotiated and resisted these imperial projects, ranging from the exercise of 'hard power' through military conquest and administration through to the appropriation and transformation of sacred landscapes. Kosiba's chapter brings a concise and comparative perspective to the spectrum of Inca interventions in the Andean agricultural landscape and Aland's examination of fishing economies under Inca hegemony forms a particularly important contribution on an under-researched topic. While the section devoted to sacred landscapes would have benefited from wider contextualized perspectives, several standout chapters in the following section on provincial colonization and negotiation (notably Alconini on the south-eastern imperial borderlands and Zori on Inca mining projects in the south-central Andean area) establish a productive balance between thematic overviews and case studies.

The themes of Inca aesthetics and administration, the Inca world under Spanish colonialism, and questions of heritage in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries form the final three sections of the volume. Here, Herring provides a particularly clear historiographical overview of Inca art

history with a strong eye to wider contexts of reception and interpretation, while both Wernke and Murphy contribute excellent overviews of the current state of archaeological research on the Early Colonial Period and on the bioarchaeological impacts of Spanish colonialism on indigenous populations. The final section on Inca heritage rounds out the volume, with strong contributions on the new meanings of Inca antiquities in the age of post-independence nationalism and burgeoning antiquarianism (Gänger) and on contemporary readings of the Inca through a comparison of Machu Picchu and the Inti Raymi festival as globalized heritage sites (Burger and Salazar).

This brief outline of the Handbook only touches on a few of the volume's high points. The establishment of wider chronological contexts through the inclusion of extended engagements both with pre-Inca statecraft and with the colonial/postcolonial periods push the volume considerably beyond what are often cursory treatments in discussions of the Inca. Similarly, the increased diversity of the contributors (particularly the inclusion of researchers from the Southern Cone) and the substantial citation of Spanish-language literatures are both commendable qualities of the Handbook.

At the same time, the volume does not entirely fulfil its aims as a comprehensive handbook on Inca studies, a deficiency that is particularly apparent in the context of other recent synthetic treatments of the subject. Firstly, while it may seem perverse to note gaps in a volume of this length, there are several important areas of Inca research that remain surprisingly absent in the Handbook. These missing topics include linguistics, warfare, climate, genetics, and bioarchaeology (this last topic absent for the Inca period apart from Turner-Livermore and Hewitt's insightful but limited discussion of isotope analyses at two sites). A considerable amount of recent research has been conducted on these substantive topics and their absence lessens the thoroughness of the volume.

Secondly, despite the inclusion of several historians and art historians, the list of contributors to the volume is strongly dominated by archaeologists and as a result is less multidisciplinary than other recent volumes. The weaker chapters are also often characterized by a tendency towards focus

on descriptive case studies and local scales of archaeological analysis, leaving the reader unable to easily place them within wider regional and comparative debates (a difficulty not helped by occasionally unclear cartography). While the editors likely recognized this as a problem given their choice to write synthetic summaries at the end of every section of the volume, these summaries only go so far in providing a clarifying, integrative framework.

Finally, although the volume seeks to “highlight major achievements of Inca scholarly work, while also setting the ground for future research” (3), this goal is only partially accomplished. The Handbook does indeed provide a strong overview of Inca studies of the past several decades, a retrospective outlook exemplified by the fact that a couple of the chapters (Bauer on the *ceque* landscape in Cuzco and Phipps on Inca and colonial textiles) are taken from older, influential publications (Bauer 1998, Phipps et al. 2004). However, an attention to likely future directions in Inca studies and in research in the Andes more generally—for instance, cross-border syntheses, the integration of new quantitative methods, and a return to robust comparative approaches — is largely missing from the book.

Nevertheless, it is worth highlighting the monumental effort clearly made by the editors in putting the book together. Many of the chapters remain excellent introductions to their topics for graduate students and scholars across the social sciences and humanities. Alconini and Covey have put together an important and enduring volume that certainly will form an important baseline for future synthetic approaches to the Inca and their legacies.

References

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